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SUBJECT: ISLAND SCHOOL FOCUSES GCOB ON ENERGY, FOOD, ENVIRONMENT  
FOR 10 YEARS

REF: 08 Nassau 623

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: A U.S. privately sponsored secondary school specializing in environmental and marine studies celebrated ten year's of conservation and education in The Bahamas in February. The school is an open-air laboratory for practical renewable energy, sustainable food production, and marine research projects. U.S.-based journalists, scientists, and educators joined with alumni, parents, and former teachers, as well as high-ranking GCOB officials, for two roundtables on environment, education, and sustainable national development. Social and cultural outreach events aimed at the local community focused on Bahamian-American collaboration in environmental protection, renewable energy innovation, and cultural exchange. Post seeks to assist the Island School with increasing its national profile and outreach in Nassau and New Providence in these areas in line with overall public diplomacy goals. Post will continue to work closely with the Island School on hurricane preparedness and other consular issues. END SUMMARY.

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SHOWCASES PRACTICAL PROJECTS  
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¶2. (U) The Island School is a research-based semester abroad program for high school sophomores and juniors concentrating on projects in marine resource management and sustainable development ([www.islandschool.org](http://www.islandschool.org)). Its mission is education, research, and conservation in an innovative, experiential-learning setting in a relatively remote and untouched part of South Eleuthera. The Island School serves U.S. citizens, while an affiliated, private Deep Creek Middle School - also funded by U.S. donors - offers unique educational opportunities to local Bahamians as well. A third entity, the Cape Eleuthera Institute (CEI), is dedicated to research, sustainable design, and environmental outreach. The U.S.-sponsored secondary school celebrated its ten-year anniversary in The Bahamas February 13-15.

¶3. (U) The Island School "practices what it preaches" with regard to sustainable systems, relying heavily on renewable energy from solar and wind sources, using bio-diesel for vehicles, collecting rainwater in underground cisterns, and running an innovative project in aquaponics - a combination of fish-farming and hydroponics - for self-sufficiency in food production. The school harvests the invasive, non-native casuarinas pine tree for buildings, furniture, and other uses, and includes locally-available materials in unique, environmentally-designed school buildings, which do not rely on air conditioning. The CEI also conducts marine research projects on reef health, offshore aquaculture, sea urchins, and sharks.

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U.S. GUESTS HIGHLIGHT POLICY,  
ENVIRONMENT, RESEARCH  
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¶4. (U) U.S.-based journalists, scientists, and educators joined with alumni, parents, and former teachers, high-ranking Bahamian officials, journalists, and the local community for two roundtables focusing on conservation policy, ocean health, environmental education, and sustainable development. A long-time New York Times

writer and editor provided an overview of U.S. environmental policy since the Nixon administration, highlighting positives and negatives. A noted marine researcher and National Geographic Explorer shared her views of the importance of conservation and marine research for the future health of the planet, given the relative lack of knowledge of the oceans, well-known problems with collapsing fish stocks, and potential for severe environmental deterioration due to climate change. Minister of Environment Earl Deveaux and Minister of National Security Tommy Turnquest congratulated the school on its ten-year anniversary and reviewed GCOB environmental policy in creating marine protected areas and conserving marine stocks, such as the grouper, which are important to the Bahamian diet and economy.

15. (U) A second roundtable focused on the importance of deep-ocean research and general education at all levels of society to foster conservation and ocean protection, which are critical not only for a small-island developing state such as The Bahamas, but for the entire world environment. A senior U.S. scientist elaborated on the idea of Planet Earth as a "life-support system" for humanity - an inter-linked structure requiring constant attention, care and maintenance. She pointed out that "Spaceship Earth" is largely dependent on the (mostly un-researched) oceans, which represent some 90% of the biosphere and are demonstrably vulnerable to negative human intervention. She stressed the potential for catastrophic system failure whether due to climate change or other human actions, such as indiscriminate or rapacious fishing methods.

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BAHAMIANS -- DEVELOPMENT,  
EDUCATION, VALUES  
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16. (U) Other speakers, including the President of the College of

The Bahamas and the President of the Senate, raised the question of what values should be employed in national development or environmental sustainability in The Bahamas. They called for increased education across-the-board in science and marine studies, in which The Bahamas has certain obvious geographic and other comparative advantages. They also pointed to local history as proof of the potential for environmental degradation, whether in the destruction of native marine resources, trees and plants, and even people. Referring to the Island School's ten years of diverse and innovative efforts, the President of the Senate spoke of The Bahamas' potential to be a laboratory not only for similar island states, but for global environment and energy policy. Rather than simply a "canary in a coal mine", The Bahamas could be an example to the world.

17. (U) Three days of social and cultural outreach events aimed at the local community focused on Bahamian-American collaboration in education, environmental protection, renewable energy innovation, and cultural exchange. Numerous U.S. guests interacted with hundreds of Bahamians from the local villages and throughout South Eleuthera in art, music, and social programs, including a fun walk and street fair with many local food and craft booths. The events were covered by TV and print media, although not with the immediacy of news and not in the depth or detail which the Island School's multiple areas of focus would seem to merit.

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COMMENT  
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18. (U) Given the intersection of energy, environment, and food production, and the GCOB's rising awareness of the different impacts of each on the national economy (reftel), Post seeks to assist the Island School with increasing its national profile and outreach in Nassau and New Providence. Post may be able to assist in the areas of education, environmental protection, renewable energy innovation, and cultural exchange in line with overall public diplomacy and commercial goals. Post will continue to work closely with the Island School administration, which participates in our warden system, on hurricane preparedness and other consular issues.

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